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## Realizing a dream

Jim and Sandy Wight to open Bullitt County's first winery

By Brandy Warren

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The Courier-Journal

About five miles east of Shepherdsville, at the rocky end of Meyer Drive, sits Jim Wight's dream.

On land next to his house, Wight and his wife Sandy are building Bullitt County's first winery.



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There already is a large metal building that houses a mixing room. Another room holds tanks and oak barrels for fermentation. Outside, there's a large 1,550-square-foot covered patio that overlooks the Wight's vineyard that, come summer, will feature more than 20 varieties of grapes.

In less than a month, there will be a tasting room with a bar, stools, tables and chairs for guests to lounge and enjoy the ambiance of the vineyard and the taste of a local wine.

"We're going to give it our best shot," Sandy Wight said, looking around the fermentation room, where in about a month 2,300 gallons of wine will be bottled.

"We already have," said Jim Wight.

The Wights are tentatively planning an opening the same Saturday as Thunder Over Louisville -- April 21. They're planning to hold a tasting where customers can sample a variety of Wight's red, white and fruit wines.

The Wight-Meyer Vineyard & Winery is located off Cedar Grove, about five miles east of Interstate 65. It's the only winery off I-65 from Louisville to Franklin County.

"I think the location is perfect," said Elaine Wilson, director of the Shepherdsville-Bullitt County Tourist and Convention Commission. "It's



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Sandy and Jim Wight walked down a row of grapes with their dog, Bear, at Wight-Meyer Vineyard and Winery. The Wights plan to open the winery April 21. (Photos by Michael Hayman, The Courier-Journal)



Several of Jim Wight's wines have won medals in the state fair.

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a great setting and it's close to the interstate."

Wilson, who has sampled Wight's amateur wines, said the winery will be a positive addition. She said the winery should complement Jim Beam's distillery, one of Bullitt's largest attractions.

Hopefully, tourists interested in the fermentation and distilling processes will consider Bullitt for a weekend getaway, Wilson said. People like to get off the interstate and sample what type of culture the community has to offer, she said.

"We're going to market this aggressively," she said.

Louisville attorney Michael Hatzell also is planning a vineyard at the top of Brooks Road, above Brooks Hill. That winery won't be ready to open for a few more years. Hatzell also is planning a tasting center and vineyard.

For Jim Wight, the process isn't just about making money. It's his passion -- one that occasionally keeps him up all night trying to create his next great wine.

"It's the creation process -- taking a good grape and turning it into a great wine," said Wight, a past president of the Kentucky Vineyard Society.

The land where the winery now sits once was owned by Wight's father-in-law, Herb Meyer, who farmed vegetables as a hobby.

"I grew up on this land," said Sandy Wight, Meyer's daughter. "My father would have been so happy if he were here. He would have loved to see it."

Jim and Sandy Wight began growing grapes about 11 years ago. Jim Wight sold them to winemakers like his brother-in-law, Raymond Meyer.


In 2002, Wight decided to start making his own amateur wines. He learned from Meyer.

Since then, he's won numerous awards as a winemaker. At the 2006 Kentucky State Fair, Wight won first-place ribbons for his vinifera, blackberry and berry wines. He also received the Best in Show award at the 2006 Cowie International Amateur Wine Competition. Wight's wines also have been recognized by Winemaker magazine.

For six years, Wight and Meyer have offered wine-tasting classes through the Bullitt County Extension Office.

Extension Agent Darold Akridge said Wight's winery will not only showcase his ability as a winemaker, but will help grape producers in Bullitt County and across the state.

Wight received a \$50,000 grant from the state to build his tasting room. In exchange, he's pledged to buy from local grape and fruit producers to make his product.



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"He's literally going to be buying tons of grapes," Akridge said. Wight estimates about 30 percent of the products needed to make his wine are grown on his property. The rest he buys.

"I can't see how he can be anything less than successful at this," Akridge said.

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